

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department  
Directives Manual**



**Positional Asphyxia**

500-003

Effective Date: 11-24-92

**I. PURPOSE**

To provide officers with information that will allow the safe transport of arrestees who may be at risk for positional asphyxia.

**II. PROCEDURE**

A. Positional asphyxia occurs when the position of the body interferes with normal breathing. The inability to adequately breathe creates a lack of oxygen in the body which may result in unconsciousness or suffocation ("asphyxiation"). The inability to breathe properly may result from the body's position interfering with the muscular or mechanical function of breathing, from compromise or blocking of the airway, or from some combination of these.

B. The body position most likely to contribute to positional asphyxia is that of being "hog-tied" (handcuffed behind, feet bound and raised toward hands, and placed face down). However, positional asphyxia may occur even though the arrestee is not restrained as described above. For example, simply being handcuffed behind (the preferred method for safety reasons) and being placed face down could cause positional asphyxia.

C. Additional factors that may contribute to positional asphyxia include:

- the mental condition of the arrestee. Some studies indicate that mental subjects may be more susceptible to positional asphyxia,
- the presence of cocaine or other stimulating substances in the arrestee's system and,
- the particular anatomy of the arrestee.

D. Because of the possibility that positional asphyxia may occur, officers should take the following precautions.

1. Avoid placing a subject in a position that is likely to contribute to positional asphyxia. In particular, restraint of an arrestee in a “hog-tied” position should be avoided whenever possible.
2. Closely monitor arrestees for signs of breathing difficulty. For example, if an arrestee who is handcuffed behind is placed face down in the rear seat for transport, the breathing of the arrestee should be closely monitored. If possible, a second officer should accompany the transporting officer to monitor the arrestee. If a second officer is not available, the transporting officer should stop the vehicle periodically and confirm that the arrestee is conscious and able to breathe normally. It is extremely important to monitor the arrestee at all times.
3. Be aware that mental subjects and substance abusers may be more at risk for positional asphyxia.

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